

THE MAN WHO WAS MUSTERED OUT...

BY LEO CRANE

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The small column of rough looking men that wound in single file through the tangled jungle was all that remained of the once mighty Twelfth. It had dwindled to this handful in the space of nine months, and no doubt when the wet season began even the skeleton would have room for fresh recruits, providing always the rebels, who lay hidden in the wild grasses, would allow the fever time enough. A rebel in the wild grass is as certain as the fever, and much quicker.

Nine months before the Twelfth had landed from the rusty red transport Southern Queen and had marched with a swinging step over the wet sand. The straggly line of palms skirting the beach swallowed them, and from that moment the decimation began.

For a time they idled in the hot sun at Quilmas, where they ate fruit, sickened, a few died and the rest recovered to curse the heat and to wonder why they didn't go up country. Then they went up country and the rebels amused them grimly. This for nine months. The Twelfth was thoroughly tired out.

"Don't you wish you were goin' home, Connelly?" asked a man trudging behind a great tall chap.

"Home! Do you ever expect to get home? Bosh!"

"Do you mean San Pedro or do you mean the real home?" asked another.

"Why, I meant home, across the water, where the people are of the white brand, and where there's hot biscuits, and a bed, and clean water and girls. Oh! I meant home!"

Harrison looked at the man and shook his head strangely.

"Don't git that way often, Parsons; it affects the head so."

"But I had a dream last night and we were all goin' home."

"Funny dream, that," said Martin.

"What you want is a good stiff dose of quinine—somethin' like twenty-five grains."

"No doubt the poor lad's nerves are gone," said another, "all jangled and out of tune."

"Wish I could dream, though," growled Connelly. "There's lots of things I'd dream about—there's"—But Connelly broke off with a murmur in his throat. The things he would dream about were evidently not for the ears of the regiment.

"You'd dream about what?" asked a man.

But his question went unanswered.

The straggly line of men emerged from the shadow and came to where they could see the white huts of San Pedro glaring in the tropical sun.

"Seems to me there's somethin' a-goin' on down there," said Martin.

"There just is that," replied Harrison, shading his eyes from the sun and gazing at the town's gate.

"Darned if I don't believe it's the reserve that's come up."

"Too good to be true, and, besides, Parsons, you're always believin' and dreamin' things."

"But if it is maybe we'll go to some place farther down the coast. Maybe we'll see somethin' new. Maybe—"

"Well, ain't you done with may-bein'?"

The tall man looked at the questioner and replied slowly:

"And maybe we'll go home!"

It seemed to stun the lot of them. One gasped and turned pale. Home! They had never given that a thought. Home? While the rebels were yet hiding in the bush and the war in progress? Then a fellow who never did anything of note before began to sing to a wonderful tune of his own:

"We're goin' home! We're goin' home! Our ship is at the shore, And you can pack your haversack, For we won't come back no more, Oh, we won't come back no more, my boys, We won't come back no more!"

and the whole rank took up the burden of the chorus:

"Oh, we won't come back no more, my boys, We won't come back no more!"

With a quickened step, born of the swinging meter of the song, the Twelfth marched to the town's little gate. The hot sun, the tropical smell, the petty ills and the quinine were all forgotten in their curiosity to learn why a strange sentry paced forward and back before the place. Like so many statues they waited for the lieutenant to reappear from the commander's hut. He came out with a smile on his face.

"The Twelfth is mustered out!"

A yell went skyward that made the vines rustle, and above all the rest big Connelly bawled:

"Hurrah! Hurrah! We're goin' home!"

Five men surrounded a pair of the new guard and begged from them an old newspaper.

"Look here, Connelly!"

"What? Newspapers? Gimme one! What a find! A newspaper!"

"Spose you almost forgot there was such a thing."

"Perhaps. See if there's anything from home."

"Home? Where d'you live anyway, Connelly?"

"Gloucester."

"Why, that's in Massachusetts."

"Of course, dummyhouse! Look for the news, will you?"

"What's the date? Five months old, this paper! Gloucester—Gloucester—here 'tis—Gloucester!"

"Man killed at the town hall last night—now that's what I call an interesting piece of news, seen' as we don't know what a killin' is. 'George Hall convicted of stealin' from Nathan Forrest'—that sounds like home—'Marriage'—that's very homelike—'Bill Thompson dead; leaves forty thousand dollars.' That's all, Connelly, from Gloucester."

"Humph! Who's married?"

"Lemme see—Miss Beatie Williams and"—

"You lie! Let me see that!"

"What in the name of nation is the matter with you, Connelly?"

"You're right, Parsons, that's all! That's all!"

And big Connelly, the man with an intense longing for home, bent down his head and walked with a swagger to the far end of the town.

The next morning, when the bugle called the men of the Twelfth from the dingy white huts, they sprang forth with alacrity.

"We're a mighty slim crowd compared to all that came up, ain't we?"

"Well, I should say! There was Sam Johnson and Jerry Patterson, Bill Williams, Harry Carter—but what's the use in countin' 'em?—all gone, and good boys, too, all good boys. But then, that's what we 'listed fur'."

"And we're the lucky dogs! I wouldn't be one of them fellers what's come to relieve us—no, not for a cool million Would you, Connelly?"

"I don't know," replied Connelly wearily.

"You don't know?"

"No, I don't know."

Then the bugle blared again. The tall man turned and walked to the lieutenant and saluted:

"Well, Connelly?"

"I—I think I'd like to stay and enlist with the other regiment sir—and—stay out the war. You see?"

The face of the lieutenant became as a stone mask and for a moment he stared fixedly. Then, remembering his rank, he said kindly:

"If you think so, Connelly, you may report to Major Southern."

The Twelfth marched out and the last man, looking back from a distant hill, saw a forlorn figure watching by the old gate. He waved a last farewell to the man in the sun painted landscape. A fellow by his side started to hum again the song of the swinging meter:

"Oh, we're goin' home! We're goin' home! Our ship is at the shore, And you can pack your haversack, For we won't come back no more, Oh, we won't come back no more, my boys, We won't come back no more!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled out the man. The skeleton of the Twelfth, minus one of the larger bones, marched on in silence.

Turquoises and the Mongols.

Turquoises are the favorite stones of all the Mongol races and are generally worn in their original state, except by the Chinese women, who have them roughly cut and wear them mixed with pearls and coral. Both the Tibetan men and women ornament themselves with lump turquoises, the men wearing them attached to their single gold ear rings, which are worn in the right ear only.

The women of Ladakh carry their fortunes on their heads, in the shape of a broad strip of red cloth studded with huge turquoises, which, starting from the forehead, is carried over the head and hangs nearly to the waist. These peraks, as they are called, sometimes cost as much as £20. By the Ladakhis these turquoises are preferred to have little black specks on them, which show their genuineness for even in the wilds of central Asia the spotless blue composition emanating from Europe is offered for sale, the bazaar at Darjeeling being flooded with it.

The Bhutia women in the Darjeeling district wear quaint brass ornaments covered with chip turquoises, which are cheap, but the Mongolians have the embossed silver plates which form such a becoming headgear, studded with really fine turquoises, for which the owners have to give valuable furs in exchange.—Cornhill.

Cruel Contests.

Bird singing contests for money and other prizes are not so frequent in England as formerly. Many of the little competitors, notably chaffinches, were subjected to dire cruelty on these occasions.

To make them sing their eyes were pierced by a red-hot needle for the purpose of completely blinding them. This was done to prevent any opposing exhibitor from frightening the birds and stopping their singing, an end which was obtained by waving some object in front of them. Blinded, the birds could see nothing, and they sang.

The cruel practice has been practically stamped out by the action of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who issued numerous summonses against offenders. It may be that in some dark corner of the country the same cruelty is still practiced, but the custom as a system is now done away with.—Pearson's.

Curious Legal Tender.

Almost every age and tribe, as well as every epoch, has had its peculiar currency or medium of barter and exchange—not only gold, silver, copper, brass, iron, lead and paper, but such out of the way articles as bits of glass shells, beads, stones, soap, bits of various colored cloth and numerous other objects, some of them absolutely valueless to our way of looking at the matter.

The Burmese, Karens, Hangees and Ghanes have no coined money, lead and silver in bullion being the ordinary tender in trade, weight and purity being the standard of value. For a long time salt was the ordinary money of the Abyssinians.

Dried fish has long been and is even today to a certain extent the legal tender of Iceland. Shad scales are also the medium of exchange in many of the North sea islands.

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